

SEMINAR-
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COVER STORY

INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES

MALE VOICE:

We're pleased to have a-- a group of people brought together to talk about the recent revelations about that crisis and what it teaches us about control of nuclear weapons in a time of crisis. The people who will be participating first in the seminar are Wayne Smith, who was the head of the Intersession under President Carter, the U.S. Intersession in Cuba, Saul Landau, who is an award-winning filmmaker and fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and an expert on Cuban studies, Phil Brenner, who's a professor at American University and one of the leading academic experts on U.S./Cuban relations, Richard Barnett, who is a senior Fellow at the Institute and was in the Kennedy administration in the period of the Cuban missile crisis, I.F. Stone, the distinguished and award-winning journalist and Marcus Raskin, who was in the National Security Council under John Kennedy.

Our speaker today is Daniel Elisberg. Dr.



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

Elisberg is now on a MacArthur Foundation fellowship, working on a study about nuclear weapons and crisis and the control of nuclear weapons in crisis. And he is obviously the most learned man to talk about our subject today.

At the time of the crisis, he was a consultant to the Secretary of Defense and to the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. In 1961, before the crisis, he drafted the general war plans of the Kennedy administration that gave guidance on basic planning for the use of nuclear weapons. In 1962, he was a working member, during the Cuban missile crisis, of the-- Secretary of Defense' consulting group. He then was the sole researcher on the interagency study that took place in 1964 on presidential decisionmaking in nuclear crises for policy planning at the State Department which gave him access to the government documents on the crisis, an access really which is unprecedented. Obviously, Dr. Elisberg, since that time, has



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

become famous outside circles of government as the man who made the Pentagon papers public so that in an attempt to try to bring this country to its senses on the Vietnam War and since that time has been active in attempting to educate the American population about the nature and danger of nuclear weapons.

In the format here, what we'll do is ask Dr. Elisberg to speak for about 20 minutes, and then open it up for the discussion of the seminar participants, and then after that, open it up to the general people in the audience. Dan.

DR. ELISBERG:

I'm particularly looking forward to hearing comments on this series of hypotheses and revelations by some people here who are expert on Cuba, such as Wayne Smith and (UNINTELL) Landau I.F. Stone. I have never been an expert on Cuba. Then, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis or now. And I might say that that was no impediment to my doing consulting on decisionmaking then, because it was taken for granted that Cuba did not matter in the kinds of



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

things I was looking at, which had to do with the risks of all out war or the risks of nuclear war. Cuba obviously did not have nuclear weapons and although for a brief time they had nuclear missiles, with or without warheads on Cuba, it was taken for granted without any question at that time that Krushchev was telling us the truth when he told us, privately and publicly, that he was in total control of his surface-to-surface missiles and also of the surface-to-air missiles. As a matter of fact, what he said to Mr. Knox at a point in the crisis was that Cubans were too emotional to be trusted with such sophisticated equipment and the President could be sure that they were, such weapons, the SAMS and the missiles were totally in his control.

The anti-aircraft which the Cubans had been trained by Russians, I believe, was known to have been manned completely by Cubans. But again it was taken for granted that Cubans were totally under the disciplined control of Krushchev himself, like any other satellite. The



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

puppet relationship there was simply taken for granted.

The effect of this was that in a quarter century of analysis of the crisis, I have found recently very few analyses that even mention Cuban politics, Cuban attitudes, as any factor in the crisis. And of the two studies that I found that did do that, one by Albert and Roberta Wolfstедder, who did seriously look at the question of the Cuban role, their conclusion was, "The Cubans played a totally passive role in the crisis and had no influence on the result." So that was their finding.

So one reason I was anxious to have discussion of this with people who know more than that about the relations between different sovereign states, including Cuba and the Soviet Union and perhaps Angola and relations in the Persian Gulf today, let's say, that this perspective on the way the world works is thrown very much into question by the revelations that I, and now Sy



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

Hirsch, has been making, and I hope others will concentrate on this.

I'm not going to recapitulate what Seymour Hirsch said very much in his story the other



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

day, because I was happy to see it really was quite complete. A number of things in which I-- in which I had told a few people recently, and this year of the anniversary, and where I found great incredulity that they could have occurred or could be known only to me, have been confirmed now by various sources, by-- by Seymour Hirsch. And I hope these things now will be discussed much more freely. But I'll just summarize.

I hope then to concentrate in the 20 minutes here on some meanings of these disclosures as I see them, which, of course, Hirsch did not do particularly in his news stories. And perhaps some meanings we can get into in our discussions for the present day.

I could summarize the understanding Hirsch was presenting of the way the missile crisis was resolved, the understanding that I arrived at in my study of 1964, as follows: First, to this day in other analyses, the question of why Khrushchev backed off exactly when and as he did,



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

why he backed down quite as quickly as he did when confronted by John Kennedy's proposal of Saturday night, October 27th, 1962, when he had rejected effectively that proposal just that morning, the morning earlier, why did he not wait at least a few more hours, press his own earlier proposal and make counteroffers, since as-- as I'll confirm here, Robert Kennedy had given him 48 hours in which to decide what to do with Kennedy's offer.

Now 48 hours did define an ultimatum and not a very long ultimatum, but in the course of that crisis, for those of you who remember the pace of it, that was a pretty long time. A lot happened in 24 and 48 hours. It certainly would have allowed Krushchev time, a day, on Sunday, in which to temporize or to make threats or counteroffers, and that is in fact what every member of the Ex Com, the Executive Committee, who knew of the ultimatum, expected him to do. Essentially, none of them expected him to do what he did do, which was to accept the offer at



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

first light Sunday morning, without any further proposals.

I'm saying the question then is why did he do that? And a question that I.F. Stone focused on in his article many years ago about the crisis says the crucial question of the crisis, "What would have happened if he had not accepted that offer, either at all or so quickly?" And I think actually one can arrive now at a quite persuasive, convincing answer to the first of those questions, and somewhat to the second.

The answer I give is, that Kennedy understood, Bobby-- Robert Kennedy-- I'm sorry, Krushchev-- Krushchev understood Robert Kennedy's message to him effectively to be something that Robert Kennedy himself did not understand it to be. Not a 48 hour ultimatum, but a 12 hour ultimatum. That is not what Bobby-- Robert Kennedy had in mind, and not what he assumed the case to be. But he in fact made two warnings, which he does separate in his account, in his own memoirs, as two separate threats or



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

warnings, but in a rather low key way. And other analysts have put them together, without realizing the significance of the two threats. He did emphasize that to me when he revealed

DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

this ultimatum really, which he didn't call an ultimatum. In '64, when I was doing this highly classified study, I was referred to him by Robert MacNamara and he told me things then that were certainly not known at that time and were not revealed until his memoirs in '68, '69 were published posthumously.

Specifically, he said that the Russians had, on the one hand, 48 hours to decide to remove the missiles or we would remove them. And probably follow that with an invasion. We would remove them by air attack. And as first quoted (UNINTELL) correctly in the story. I said to Kennedy at the time, "So he had 48 hours to decide." And Bobby interjected at that point. And he said, "Unless he hit another recon plane." Because he had earlier told me, as he says in his memoirs, that we were going to continue to fly recon. We must do that because of Soviet duplicity and because of the whole situation. And that if another, a second recon plane, was shot down, the SA2 missile having, we thought, been fired at the U-2 that morning and



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

shot down we would, he puts it in his memoirs, hit back immediately. But to me he was a little more specific. He said, "We would hit all of the surface-to-air missiles immediately and probably the surface-to-surface missiles, and probably that would be followed by an invasion."

So I said to him, so he said then, "Unless another recon plane is-- is knocked down. And then we would hit immediately." And so I said to make it clear that I'd gotten it, I said, "So he had 48 hours to decide, but he could have the whole operation start right away if he decided to shoot at a recon." He said, "That's right."

The-- this should not be too surprising to anyone, although after his memoirs have appeared, because it's very consistent with what we do know of what was happening in the Ex Com at that time. As early as Wednesday the Executive Committee, under the President, had decided that if a first plane were shot down, we would immediately, within two hours, hit the surface-to-air missile that fired the shot, on



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

the assumption, by the way, that only a surface-to-air missile rocket could hit a U-2 at high altitude, not anti-aircraft. And that if a second plane were shot down, we would hit all the sounds and perhaps the missiles as well. Now that decision had been decided on essentially for several days at that point.

Kennedy made the very important decision on Saturday, after the U-2 was missing, that he would not carry out the first part of that. We would in effect give them one-- one shot, one plane. But on the quite clear understanding that Recon would continue and that if a second plane were shot down, then the earlier plan would be followed. We would hit not at that point one SAM, two planes having been shot down, we would hit all the SAMs and it did not make sense to have a large air strike against SAMs and anti-aircraft and leave the missiles standing. So it was understood that the missiles and probably other things would go too. And with such an enormous operation going on then, which would include Soviet ground



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

troops, "you--" the spirit was clearly you might as well invade, and almost surely pressures would lead you to invade, if you went that route.

The revelation then, in Bobby's memoirs, and to me earlier, was that this was not merely a private decision on the U.S. part, not too hard to figure out by the Soviets, but was communicated as a direct warning to Krushchev via Dobren(ph) Saturday night, at about 7:45. And inasmuch as Krushchev was understood to be in full control of everything that was happening and would happen, I assumed then, and I'm sure now, everyone expected that warning to be thoroughly effective. We were planning recon for the next day. There was simply no reason the Russians would disregard that warning to shoot down a reconnaissance plane unless they wanted war, which was a live hypothesis in the minds of even Soviet experts, since Saturday morning when-- when U-2 was shot down. The question was, doesn't this mean he wants war?



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

My evidence then, which is pretty well summarized in Sy Hirsch's piece, and he covered each piece of it, part of it confirmed by other people who had seen the same evidence, none of whom had seen all of the parts of it as I had, is this: When Kruschev heard that his SAMs and missiles would be hit if another recon plane was shot down, he knew they would be hit as soon as a recon plane flew over. Because he knew that he was not in control of-- of Cuban anti-aircraft which was firing since Saturday morning on low-flying planes. That has been confirmed by Castro repeatedly, including in Ted Schultz' book, and he may have known or feared, I mean he had strong reason to fear, that his SAMs would not be in full control of the Soviets, that even the SAM might have been fired, and another one might again be fired by essentially Cuban will.

I want to repeat that even if that were not the case, the anti-aircraft point, which is so thoroughly confirmed by Schultz and earlier by Castro's statement to Saul Landau and Mankowitz



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

in 1974, that he controlled the anti-aircraft, that alone told Krushev that as soon as Castro's gunners got accurate enough to hit a recon plane, his missiles were gone. That was a highly credible warning.

One might doubt that Kennedy fully intended to carry out his 48 hour ultimatum. Perhaps Kennedy himself did not know that for sure. And the recent revelation by Rusk that he was preparing at least a strong option to trade the Turkish missiles for the MRBMs, the next day, Sunday, the 28th, suggested there was a degree of bluff in his ultimatum, that he was prepared to back down tomorrow, the next day. But he had not backed down on Saturday. And in any case, as I'm saying, the first part of the warning was thoroughly believable, in fact, hard not to believe. And that was, "Hit a second plane, and you will be hit." That took no-- that was a 12-hour warning.

The evidence that I have says that the-- actually, this is another piece, that Sanko(ph),



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

the commander of Soviet missile forces in Cuba, Ygorst Dosanko(ph), told Utante(ph) on the 30th, two days later in Havana, that the order to dismantle the missiles came at 1:00 a.m. and the missiles-- I'm sorry, between 1:00 and 3:00 a.m., he said, and the missiles began to be dismantled at 5:00 a.m., first light.

The-- the proposal was broadcast then publicly, about, as I recall, 9:00 o'clock the next morning, and was replied to. Immediately accepted by Kennedy. Kennedy and Krushev in short, show, we know, great signs of concern that events could go out of their control once two-sided conflict started. They both had a very lively, vivid notion of that, for which they are given credit by many people, and I think deservedly.

What they did not foresee on Friday was that events would start going out of control quite so soon. In fact, they were out of control-- Krushev was out of control, I'm saying, on Saturday morning, at a time when no one on our



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

side imagined such a possibility. And, of course, Kennedy by making a threat and committing himself to it, had in effect given the trigger, not as an ultimatum supposes to Krushev, but to Castro. He had given Castro the ability to start a war between the United States and Soviet Union. Not initially a nuclear war, but one that could turn nuclear by the same sort of process we're describing here.

Kennedy did not know he had given the trigger to Castro or that Castro was anywhere near that trigger. Krushev had told him otherwise, and that fit into our own stereotype of control over there. Krushev, it turned out, had put these missiles in range, contrary to his own expectations of someone who might possibly take them over and act, that is to say, act independently. Undoubtedly, that came as a good deal of shock to Krushev on early Saturday morning when they started firing. But it's also interesting that Krushev did not then make the offer on which he finally settled Saturday morning. He decided to wait a day and see



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

whether, after all, Kennedy would cave in.

Kennedy, we know now from the information coming out on the transcript of the 27th, was ready on, for his part, to make a trade of the Turkish missiles as early as Saturday morning. Not only late that night, Saturday night, when he talked to Rusk. But he did not make that offer. He was prevailed on by the other members of the Ex Com again. "Wait a day. See if Krushchev caves in." He won that gamble. But at any hour of that day, Krushchev could have lost the bet for everybody here, by in fact shooting down another plane. Both of them, in other words, Krushchev and Kennedy, were making extremely reckless gambles without any full appreciation.

I'm taking up most of my time. Let me sum this up. Well, there is one further factual point I'd like to make, but first let me give one summary point. Since I've known this information, and I haven't gone here much into detail how I know it or what it was, it's affected, which was in '64, it's affected very



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

much my own personal perspective on the risks of the nuclear era and the likelihood of war. I can say that during the crisis I put the risk of war no higher than any of the hawks, let us say, in the sense that I believe that Krushchev had to back down eventually. I was not in favor of an air strike, but I was in favor of pressure, I can say, on Cuba, on the assumption that he was so outgunned, both in the Caribbean and worldwide, that he had to back down. So I put the probability very low in my mind, of war, as did Taylor, Dillon, McCloy, a number of others to this day.

I learned two things in the course of my study, which affected me very much. One was that the members of the Ex Com did not put it that low. I was told the day after the crisis peaked, on Monday, November 29th-- October 29th, by Harry Vaughn, who worked for Nitsa(ph), that Nitsa had regarded the probability of nuclear war as one in ten. Harry and I, at that moment, had thought of it as one in 100, one in 1000. One in ten. And he said he was low man. Later, of



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

course, Kennedy was quoted privately, and then publicly, as having thought the risk was one third to one half.

I remember very vividly my reaction when I heard that one in ten. My first thought was, why did he put it that high? I didn't see a process where these two reasonable men, heads of the superpowers, could possibly have let things go that far. That was a fleeting thought, though an interesting one.

My major reaction was, "One in ten! And we were doing the things we were doing!" Our President had us blockading Russian ships, bringing submarines to the surface, preparing air strikes against missiles, when he thought there was a ten percent chance of thermonuclear war coming out of this? That was a shock to me, which I puzzled over for a long time. It was one of the things that led to my study later, why he thought that, and later I heard, of course, the one third to one half. And could it be true? And how do I understand that he was willing to



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

go ahead with such risks? Remember, I was saying the man who decided not to accept the Turkish trade, though he thought it was fair (Kennedy), on Saturday and put it off for another day was a man, I learned a few days later, who thought he was taking a very big risk of nuclear war. I was a cold warrior, but not that kind of a cold warrior. I did not think ten percent or 30% risk of nuclear war should be accepted there. But I, foolishly focusing this on myself, the point here is what that led me to study. And I look back on myself. I understand that now. I was 31 years old. I was four years out of the Marines. I was young and foolish. And for that matter, Castro, who was firing these rockets and risking World War III, was 35 that year. He'd been in the hills for a long time, and he was under attack.

One could put the question, though, to some older men, Nitsa, McCloy, Dillon and others, what they thought they were doing during this period. But the conclusion that I draw is that with weapons on both sides, and now we'll have



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

to say, now I understand to say, not just on both sides, but advanced weapons in more and more countries in the world, non-nuclear weapons and soon nuclear weapons, I think the world is as risky as the public tends to think. And I've known to be-- that I've been out of key with fellow "experts" on nuclear war for a generation on that point. Fortunately, there are no experts on nuclear war. We don't have that experience on two-sided nuclear war, only on one-sided nuclear war in Hiroshima. But we have specialists and people who spend their lives at it, and I was one of those.

They tend to believe the public is very foolish and that Kennedy was very wrong when he put the risks that high. They tend to believe, according to Daniel Yankelovich's survey of them in 1984, that the risks are essentially negligible. The world is a safe place because the weapons are, at least 'til now, in the hands of very sober people with sober, responsible careful staffs on both sides. I don't know what the Russian is for best and brightest. We can



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

assume they-- they find it over there. And there is therefore nothing to worry about. I'm saying since 1964, when I learned these facts, which I guess we'll go into in discussion, I have felt Kennedy was right. The risks were high and part of the reason for that is he was right for reasons he did not know at the time. And his advisors have never learned since. They have not learned the facts and therefore they have not learned really the inferences that I make from--

(OFF-MIKE CONVERSATION)

* * * *



MALE VOICE:

Let me start off with a question to Dan. Why do you think it was that nobody in the policymaking circles believed that the Cubans couldn't have had any control over either the anti-- either the SAMs or the conventional anti-aircrafts?

DR. ELISBERG:

Well, the-- in the first place, there was stereotyped then and now, to a very large extent, or to put it this way, the administration, this administration has returned to a stereotype, that the Soviet Union is the cause of all the trouble for us in the world in a very disciplined and precise way -- not just in a general ideological way, but that they pull strings. They've even floated the notion that every terrorist act is sort of planned at a center, and they put that center preferably in Moscow with a subcenter in-- in Libya, ignoring some other candidates. One hopes they know better in private.

But the stereotype then was that a puppet nation, (UNINTELL), was surely under the total control of the KGB and of Krushchev. Just as



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

says, and might believe about Nicaragua today. To say that he could believe that of Nicaragua is to say something frightening, but that's the burden of my talk here. It's possible he could believe that. In any case, it's harder for others to believe that today, but in '62 it was not. After all, there had been only a Castro regime very briefly there. We were very uncomfortable with it.

So the notion was, it was assumed, that he did it. And two other things should be said, that Khrushchev controlled it. Khrushchev did say that in his public letter on the 27th. He made a point of saying it. Of course, one could say Kennedy was just complaining at that very moment that Kennedy-- Khrushchev had lied to him. But on this point, he was saying something so plausible to us that the opposite simply did not occur.

I think the transcripts will show that the hypothesis that Cubans might have had some influence on this did not arise. I haven't seen the October 27th transcripts, so let me make



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

that guess, that it simply didn't occur to anyone. By the way, the way-- let me introduce some data here. The way it did come to me-- well, as I said, I didn't want to repeat too much that's in the Hirsch article, but I'll just mention, the way I did learn of it first as a possibility, before I heard of the fire fight(?), was my access in '64 to the telephone logs conversations, transcripts of telephone conversations in the high office of-- Secretary of State and the Undersecretary of State. I didn't see all of their conversations, needless to say. As I said, that was incorrect. But I did see the relevant ones on Cuba, and learned that Stevenson was reporting to Secretary Rusk on the 31st of October. That would be Wednesday, that ... a man that we later identified as Dosanko(ph), that they had Soviet forces in Cuba, missile forces, had -- a very credible source -- had asserted to U Thant(ph), as Secretary General of the U.N., that it was a Cuban colonel that shot our plane down.

Now that was known then to Rusk and Stevenson



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

and presumably some others. The very next day, Castro himself said that to U Thant directly, that-- and he said something else. Cuban artillerymen, he said, shot the plane down.

So we had the Soviet commander and Castro himself saying it. Why didn't that simply make it part of the awareness then of the group? The crisis is now still very much underway. This is not history. This is during the crisis. And that can be answered, I can say from the time.

It didn't make any sense. It was assumed that a U-2 had to be shot down by a SAM. That's actually not true. Powers, in Soviet Union, may not have been shot down by a SAM. We actually don't know how he was shot down, to this day. He-- the SAM-- the U-2 may actually have been forced to lower altitude, perhaps by a SAM and finished off by artillery, which may be why Castro keeps saying it was artillery that shot him down. We thought of that as simply impossible. So that's Castro mouthing off. And simply put out of people's minds. It didn't



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

enter as a hypothesis. The-- Dosanko said one other thing that was very significant. It's-- by the way, this thing is all described in U Thant's memoirs, which I've seen quoted by no study that I've read, with one exception. But he didn't include this from the telephone conversation, which is the way things happened.

I never saw a piece of paper other than this transcript of an oral conversation. No report that described either of these pieces of information, Cuban colonel shot down the plane, or the following one. All the anti-aircraft, both SAM and conventional, is manned by Cubans. Now that telephone conversation from Dosanko via U Thant and Stevenson is the 31st of October. Most of you aren't steeped in the chronology here, as I have been the last couple of months. I'll remind you.

The ultimatum by Bobby Kennedy-- the shootdown was the morning of the 27th, Saturday. The ultimatum was the evening of the 27th. Kruschev's surrender, call it that, was the



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

morning of the 28th. The joint chiefs were still saying for days after that that they did not believe that Krushchev was sincere, and were urging that we do low level reconnaissance, which we were doing, and some of them were urging that we still go ahead with an air strike. In any case, they were very alert to continuing the crisis at high pitch.

So here we have this piece of information already. Now just a few days later, the 30th, that's two days after the backdown. I've never seen that controverted. I've never seen any comment in all the literature, when Cubans did take over the SAMs. We know they took them over at some point. He said they had them by Tuesday or Wednesday. Is it possible, if that's true, that they had taken them after the SAM had been-- the U-2 had been shot down? That suggests strongly that they were at least in operational control as early as the 27th, when that's shot down.

At any rate, this has never been mentioned. How



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

could, if I may ask, how could people miss this sort of thing for 23 years? The answer is that each piece of the information did not look significant or credible in itself. To understand the-- the significance of it, you had to have other pieces. And in these secret-- the way our secrecy system works, with information compartmented the way it is, it is commonplace for crucial parts of a puzzle never to reach the people who needed to understand the significance of the information they have.

So we have a situation then where what I'm saying about the Cuban shooting down the anti-aircraft and possibly the SAM, was not thought of not only in '62 or '64, it wasn't understood for 25 years. The-- other part that I haven't alluded to, I think I shouldn't continue without mentioning it, was the information which Sy Hirsch has identified as being communications intercepts of the Soviets now. This is a telephone conversation reported by the person who made it, very closely held in the State Department.



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

CIA and NSA in '64 acquired intelligence that there had been a fire fight in the vicinity of the SAM site that shot down, as they assumed, they assumed shot down the U-2. Let me put in brackets, there is so little-- so much we don't know about all this. We do not really know, to my knowledge (and I have a lot of knowledge), that the U-2 was shot down by a SAM at all. We can come back to that.

But the assumption was that it was, and that it had been shot down from a site called the Los Angeles SAM site, very near Bonness(ph) Cruise Missile Base. And the intelligence that became available in '64, Hirsch tells-- says that it was by breaking a code, a Russian code, which had not been available earlier, and reading the old traffic, was that there had been a firefight. The information was gained during the firefight. It was not a report by somebody. It was a succession of messages, according to Hirsch, which said there has been an attack, we are counterattacking. We have taken casua-- we, the Russians. This is in Russia now. Major



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

Melsef(ph) of Bonness reporting to his commanders. We have taken casualties: three dead; 15 wounded. It's often said that Major Anderson was the only casualty of the Cuban missile crisis, but there were three Russian dead and 15 wounded. Isn't that interesting?

How could anyone fail to miss the significance? Well, I'll tell you, I was around the CIA people when that report came in. And I know that they did miss the significance, and that I couldn't tell them. Very simply. And I'll use this just as an example of the whole thing. There'd been a Russian firefight. Russians were killed. It wasn't certain who they were attacking. It was assumed they were attacking Cubans.

Interesting, but what?

Unless you knew of Robert Kennedy's ultimatum the same night, or rather the night after this takeover, and the shooting of the SAM, this thing did not have any obvious significance. On the other hand, if you heard, if you were one person in State, one of the handful who knew of



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

this telephone conversation a few days later, that the Soviet-- that the Cubans had shot down the U-2, no one could imagine, in answer to your question earlier, this is the end of a long answer, no one could imagine that that could be true, because it had to be-- had to be a SAM and the Cubans didn't control SAM. When you read of a firefight at a SAM site the night before Major Anderson is shot down, a bell goes off, if you know of the State Department statements, or of the ultimatum.

I did know that. Because of the interagency study I was doing which broke through these compartments, I knew these three pieces. Castro and Soviet statements to U Thant; Robert Kennedy's ultimatum warning on reconnaissance, and now I knew of how the U-2 could have been shot down by Castro. That made a picture that was fairly-- fairly clearcut.

More-- later, after that, from you it so happens, from your book in '74 with Mankowitz and Land--



MALE VOICE:

Kirby Jones.

DR. ELISBERG:

-- Kirby Jones, I learned that Castro had been independently firing the anti-aircraft artillery. I didn't-- I'd heard it from the State, but I'd never seen it confirmed before. And that alone does it. Without the U-2. If he was firing the U-2. And I've asked Saul if I could quote something that he told me before, which he hadn't before-- he can go into this. He asked, or someone asked Castro in the interview, in '74, who had fired or who had decided to fire on the planes. And you can give it in your own words, but as I understand it, Castro replied, off the record, "We gave the orders to fire and we shot down planes," which they interpreted to mean two planes at least. And there is in fact evidence, strong evidence, that a second plane was shot down. I'll get to that later. I've talked long enough.

MALE VOICE:

Well, you can just add one point to that, that we used the Cuban word for missile or rocket, and he did not use the word for anti-aircraft.



DR. ELISBERG:

That's consistent, by the way, since he so often said anti-aircraft artillery. By the way, Krushchev, in his memoirs, this is-- I don't think this is in Hirsch's piece-- Krushchev in his memoirs, which everyone doubted at first when it came out but it seemed to be pretty well accepted now as a source, came out in 1970, says as follows about the U-2.

"Cuban artillerymen shot down the U-2." He then makes the very plausible-- I've not seen that statement quoted in any account of the missile crisis, although in a dozen accounts they quote his account of Bobby Kennedy's demeanor with Dobrynin when he was making the threats. That's on the previous page. This is on the next page. No one has ever quoted the statement that Cuban artillerymen shot down the U-2.

We come back to your question. This is on the public record now. They don't even raise a question, they don't quote. I can't explain that. This is the epistemology of national security at stake, the epistemology of crisis. People do not, did not raise the question because it couldn't be true. And it didn't even register



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

as a question. Krushchev then says something again really quite striking, the sort of things that one, makes, makes the memoir look a little more authentic.

He says "We were very concerned."

(UNINTELL) "We were very concerned because we did not believe Kennedy could stomach this." Now it would have been right to be so concerned.

I'm struck at this stereotype of the two sides, to realize that in 25 years there is not a single account of-- I've been studying I think all of the accounts. I've not found a single one that speculates as to the mood in the Kremlin after Major Anderson was shot down by somebody. The major spec-, the major assumption is that it was done by Krushchev. No speculation as to why he would have done it, or what he was thinking, if he did do it deliberately, having done it.

Presumably he was thinking "Ha! That will show them!" You know, the pesky capitalists will know better now and so forth. We do know the mood of President Kennedy's men when they learned that a SAC U-2 had wandered over Russian



DR. ELISBERG (cont'd):

territory and Russian fighters had been scrambled at the same moment. Roger Hillsman was so panicked by this, he was told by Kennedy, Kennedy said "Get that man some sleep. Get him home."

General Birchenall (PH) says in his oral history-- he was one of the sponsors of my study, Inspector of the Joint Staff--that Kennedy, that McNamara was in the Joint, the War Room, my old haunts, when the news came through of the SAC U.S.-U-2 over Russia, unauthorized. He said Kennedy went absolutely white, said "This means war with the Soviet Union" and rushed out of the room.

But of course Russians don't worry about such things, on their side. In short, I'm saying Krushchev has this evidence that he was panicking and let it go. Sorry to take so long.

MALE VOICE:

I'm astounded that people thought that the Cubans couldn't have been involved. I mean it shows-- I agree with (OVERTALK) Yeah, I agree with what you say that these things become so compartmentalized. You get an Ex Com in a room and



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

no one knows the first thing about Cuba, the people who are dealing with it.

MALE VOICE:

There was no Cuban expert.

MALE VOICE:

And so they just take it for granted, although all the evidence, and you don't have to be terrible literate even to read the evidence, all the evidence is to the contrary. I mean Castro is saying at the time that the international communist movement is not the Catholic Church. There is no Rome and there is no Pope. And each party will do what it wants.

MALE VOICE:

Were you there then?

MALE VOICE:

I was a Cuban expert, at that point. And there was-- I mean the C.I. had been totally wrong about Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. There was absolutely no reason to think, none whatsoever to think that the Cubans would be a passive actor in this. All the evidence was exactly to the contrary, and while I don't think we know even today who shot the U-2 down, whether it was the Cubans



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

-- Was it a Cuban commander in control? Was it a Soviet commander? We really don't know. Castro says one thing one time and something else again. It doesn't really matter. The evidence at that time, as I recall it, was such that we were not sure whether the SAM sites, all the SAM sites, were under the control of the Soviets or were some under the control of the Cubans. And we did know that the anti-aircraft batteries were under the control of the Cubans. And we ought to-- I mean we knew, Cuban, Cuban specialists certainly knew that the Cubans would fire if they had a chance to do so. And they wouldn't give a shred of a-- They wouldn't give a nickel what the Soviets thought of it. They would do it on their own.

So that the fact that our senior leaders were making decisions, assuming that the Cubans would be passive actors, is simply astonishing. Only surpassed, I would say, in its, in its incredible nature by the fact that we continue today. And we have the Soviet Brigade issue over pretty much the same sort of thing, with our senior leaders assuming that all they had to do was



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

raise this with the Soviets and the Soviets would cooperate with us by removing the Brigade and that the Cubans again would be passive actors. When there was never a shred of a chance that they would be.

All I'm saying is that those of us who have followed Cuba, this isn't a revelation at all. We would have expected the Cubans to have fired on any American planes. They had, they had an opportunity to, to fire upon. We certainly wouldn't have expected them to be passive actors. And anyone who did simply didn't understand the Cubans. Didn't understand the relationship between the Soviets and the Cubans.

But it's, it's something that hasn't changed.

MALE VOICE:

Can I say something? (OVERTALK) Where were you exactly in October of '62?

MALE VOICE:

Oh in October I was in Recife, Brazil. I came back shortly thereafter.

MALE VOICE:

I wanted to ask you, as a Cuban specialist, you



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

would know-- Are you aware of any of your colleague Cuban specialists being involved?

MALE VOICE:

No, No. No one was asked about the Bay of Pigs. No one was asked about the missile crisis. I was Chief of Mission in Havana. I was Chief of Mission in Havana at the time of the Soviet Brigade issue, and I sent in cables at that point saying don't expect that they're going to cooperate because the Cubans will never let them get away with it. They just hosted a Summit Conference. They will never allow the Soviets to pull the Brigade out, even if the Soviets might be willing to do so. The Cubans won't sit still for it. So forget it.

I don't think anyone paid the slightest attention to the cables. At least in that instance I had a chance to send them in.

MALE VOICE:

Didn't Krushchev have to make that same assumption that Kennedy made? To put the missiles in? He must have assumed that he could control the situation (INAUDIBLE).



MALE VOICE:

No, I think he may have assumed that he could control the missiles, but not necessarily the situation. I think it was a gamble on Krushchev's part. It was a very-- it was a dangerous gamble on his part. He must have known Castro by then. He'd been dealing with him for a year and a half. And to put the missiles in Cuba, knowing that you might not be able to control Castro, I think was a (OVERTALK).

MALE VOICE:

Well either way, if he didn't know, he was risking the world. And if he did know, he was being very reckless. In other words, I'm not pointing, I don't mean to point by the way only at the U.S. decisionmaking in this crisis. What comes through to me is a story in which there are no real heroes at the top. Given Castro is a very good excuse, but for his most violent act in the thing, but he did in fact risk the world without knowing it. He is the single person involved in that--staff or leader--who has said he was wrong. He said "I was incorrect." I think he said it to you, in fact (UNINTELL). He said I was foolish, I was hotheaded, I should



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

not have done that. The others, however, Krushchev was taking these risks, Kennedy was taking these risks, and that's the world I've been with again since '64, when I learned it.

MALE VOICE:

Well I think that, first of all I think the analysis is very very interesting. But I think also that it has to be put into the context of the American buildup in 1961 and 62, to understand why the Soviets undertook what they did undertake. We had a situation where the Kennedy Administration came to power, wanting to build up a flexible response and basically accounted for strategy. And that it undertook to do so, virtually needlessly, in March of 1961. It added some three and a half million dollars to the Defense Budget and then by 1962, by the fall of '62, it had gone up some eleven billion dollars beyond the 39½ billion dollar number.

So that the notion of a buildup in strategic missiles was very important to the American strategy. And you'll recall that in the summer of 1961 there was a very great deal of talk about the possibility of a first strike



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

over the Soviet Union as a result of the Berlin Crisis.

So the Soviet perception was here we are, we have something like two to five missiles, according to the American numbers, right (ripe?) for (?), and we are in the position strategically to have to do something about this. And so that I suspect that the way they thought they were going to counterbalance the American buildup was by putting missiles, some sort of missiles into Cuba.

Now one thing which I think is very int-, you know, which is critical about this is not only the particular questions which are raised about whether or not a client is able to go its own way. But rather what is the background and the frame of reference which gets us into this habit of mind, gets us into this particular sort of situation where, you know, one or several people are risking the lives of everybody in the world, either through accident or miscalculation or whatever.

And it is interesting that in the discussion that I had with the speechwriter for Krushchev,



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

Berlaski (PH), who pointed out that the Soviets were equally frightened. And that indeed he recalls the various advisors sending their children out of town.

MALE VOICE:

This is the one who helped Krushchev on his letters?

MALE VOICE:

That's right. And they were sending the kids out of Moscow for that weekend. Even one of the people in the White House, Wiesner (PH), used to keep track of whether or not there was going to be a war for that particular week by seeing where the children of the Kennedys were on a week-by-week basis. So there was this kind of crisis mentality, which I suppose was exciting to people, nervewracking-exciting, suggesting the importance that everybody had in terms of making those sorts of decisions. And really walking that sort of tightrope between life and death, which I suspect people really enjoy. That that was very much a part of the mentality of that particular period, until they walked so close to the edge they realized that this, they just couldn't continue to do that.



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

Just one last point on that. I think what has to be looked at are, as well, are what are the lessons that were learned. Well we know that one set of lessons was that the Russians built up their own missiles after 1962. They really went on a very big campaign to do so. Secondly, that the United States, and I think the Joint Chiefs, believed that they in fact would be able to go along with a war in Southeast Asia, because the Soviets would stay in their own sphere of influence and not be prepared, so they thought, to be confronted by the United States if the United States went directly into Vietnam, into Southeast Asia. So that was, you know, another lesson that was learned.

The President learned a lesson, or really had learned this before, which was that he had ordered the missiles out of Turkey in the summer of 1961, in June of 1961, and the, the Joint Chiefs did nothing about it. And they were still there over a year later. So that was also another shock, as it were--that you can order somebody to do something, the President, and nothing, you know, is necessarily going to happen.



MALE VOICE:

Are you saying (INAUDIBLE)?

MALE VOICE:

That's right.

MALE VOICE:

Kennedy was ready to take the (OVERTALK)

MALE VOICE:

He ordered the taking of the missiles out of,
out of Turkey.

MALE VOICE:

Greg (?), I would like to say something and ask
Dick (?) to respond directly on that point.
Or did you--

MALE VOICE:

No (INAUDIBLE).

MALE VOICE:

You-- Mark has raised a very important point
of the linkage of this whole crisis to nuclear
buildup. But I could also say to the risk of
nuclear war. It has been commonplace to say
then and now that there was really close to no
risk of nuclear war at a time when the Soviets
then had just ten operational missiles. They
had four the year before. They now had-- We're
building about sixty, seventy under construction,



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

but they had about ten operational. We had of course hundreds of missiles, warheads, and thousands of bombers. So it was assumed that a nuclear war could not arise.

I suggested it could arise the same way as this, and let me-- I have two pieces of news. It occurred to me, I wasn't thinking I'd be presenting news to this, but just discussing yesterday's discussion. But I know there's two things that I did discuss with Hirsch that didn't get into his article, are worthy of putting out. One is the relation of nuclear weapons directly to the crisis, in the closest terms. Of course the usual link was that the Russians were expected to retaliate against Turkey, the Turkish missiles, if we hit as we were planning, scheduling to do, if we hit the Soviet MRBMs.

I personally spent Saturday afternoon, October 27th, some period of time, writing options very rapidly for the Ex Com on what we could do, the different options for responses when the Soviets responded to our attack by hitting our missiles in Turkey. And that very-- We did not include a nuclear response, as an option



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

to that. But it was very clear that when you're talking NATO and you're talking (UNINTELL) very far from our shores, as in Berlin, very quickly you got outmanned in the conventional, and our nuclear threat was brought in.

But that is not the point I was about to mention. In '64, since I also had access to the files of the Joint Chiefs which are the most secret, I could say-- CIA and NSA are nothing in their sensitivity compared to the way the JCS hold their cards close to their chest. But I had the Minutes of the JCS meeting of Sunday morning, the 28th, during which this meeting the Kennedy-- the Krushchev statement that he was dismantling the missiles came through.

I do not believe they had it at the very beginning, the first item here. But it came in during the meeting, as follows. I'll read it rapidly. I can show this to anybody later. These are my notes.

"In view of recent intelligence on Soviet equipment in Cuba," paragraph, this is a reference to frog missiles, over ground, more or less cruise missiles, short-range missiles



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

which can have either nuclear or non-nuclear warheads. It was the frog missiles that were in Egypt, which gave rise to the crisis in '73 when we believed they were bringing in nuclear warheads in Egypt.

They had just discovered on the 28th that there were frog missiles with the Soviet troops. I might mention, by the way, that it was not until at the height of the crisis the records will show, and I remember this very vividly, we in preparing invasion plans believed that there were three to five thousand Soviet troops on the island. Twenty-two thousand came out of the island, when they left. The Soviet Brigade, that they were talking later, they didn't all leave. But there were about twenty thousand there earlier.

If we had attacked, we would have attacked not just Cubans and not three thousand Russians. We would have found ourself facing twenty thousand Russians, which we did not know at the time of the invasion plans. But what we had just learned was that the several thousand Russian troops, supposedly, had frog missiles. Here's the JCS



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

response to that knowledge. Request-- JCS requests recommendation from SYNCLANT (PH), Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic, Fleet, on any changes necessary in his planning, particularly whether U.S. invasion forces, scheduled for Tuesday--this is Sunday--should be equipped with TAC nukes. To respond to the Russian frogs.

They got a reply during the meeting which lasted from 9 o'clock in the morning till 2 o'clock that day. Lant replied, considered it prudent that U.S. air and ground forces earmarked for Cuba have an atomic delivery capability. No other-- Aside from this, of course, there was no rationale for such a thing.

So the JCS authorized him to take nuclear capable delivery systems, for instance 8-inch Howitzer, Honest John, but no nuclear weapons--that is warheads--themselves, without further JCS approval.

Now of course that morning Kennedy accepted Krushchev's proposal, a no-invasion pledge. But here is the way the rest of the meeting went. Tentatively to schedule four low-level reconnaissance flights for late afternoon.



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

And that airc-, that aircraft--this is very interesting--that aircraft would fly through any fire encountered. Meaning that the Joint Chiefs were accepting further shootdowns, if there were any --this is a parenthetical judgment. But as someone who worked with the Joint Staff an awful lot, meaning since the only way we can get this President to attack these SAMS is to have a shootdown, four low level would be about right. And they should fly through any fire encountered. They don't usually get that specific at the Joint Chiefs level, I can tell you.■

Kennedy himself, of course, made the Presidential order: no further recons that day.

Then draw attention of SYNCs-- This is a message sent from the Joint Chiefs--to the unified and specified commanders--to the latest Krushchev message which JCS thought might be an insincere proposal intended to gain time.

Again, considered loss of U-2 the previous day. No action-- That is, the fact that Kennedy has refused action.

Well the recon did go the next day and was very heavily fired on. The Joint Chiefs



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

continued to interpret, and CIA actually, that there was no dismantling. They didn't conclude that Krushchev was actually tearing out his offer till later in the week.

On Monday, November 5th, 1972, the following Monday, the following message now was on the telephone messages of Mr. Ball, the Under Secretary of State. And this I believe has never appeared in print anywhere, and I don't know anyone who knows it, actually, like the earlier item. I'm not aware of anyone ever having mentioned it.

McNamara to Ball, telephone, 11:59 a.m., November 5th. From intercept --that would mean of Soviets or Cubans, not from our message -- From intercept looks as if we have lost a plane. The following week. A low-level one, shot down by Russian-speaking people. Para, Footnote: earlier intelligence here shows that the anti-aircraft, which was shooting at low level, was manned by presumably Cubans, we knew all Cubans, who spoke Russian with a Spanish accent. They had apparently been trained in Russia in their, in Russia, presumably. But still an interesting,



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

a provocative item. By Russian-speaking people.

And it appears we have a fighter attack on two of our other aircraft. From intercept it looks as if we have lost a plane and it appears we have a fighter attack on two of our other aircraft. Our own aircraft have not yet reported in. This should be held very closely.

I was discussing this with one person today as to why it had to be so closely held on November 5th, Monday. November 6th, Tuesday, was Election Day. Not a real good day to tell the American people that a week after the deal had been made and the crisis was over and the triumphs had been achieved, that in fact the Russians or Cubans, either one, had just shot down and it was on again.

I just told you now, as I say, what's never appeared. If McNamara believed that we had lost another plane. That's as far as that record goes. My memory from the Pentagon very clearly-- By the way, Sol's, what he got from Castro in '74 was planes, at that time.

My memory very sharply of that Monday afternoon, because it was very spectacular, was



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

that intense meetings were going on as to whether we should now react to this new shootdown. The Commander of TACT (PH), I recall, I was told by Harry Rowan that afternoon, during the process, was strongly recommending a full air strike against -- Remember, the missiles had not yet left Cuba -- against at least all the SAMS and anti-aircraft. But Kennedy chose not to do that the day before Election. And in fact we haven't heard of it for 25 years. So you've heard it now.

OFF MIKE VOICES

MALE VOICE:

And that's my last long answer (INAUDIBLE).

MALE VOICE:

The time's almost out and we've had an admirable but minuscule and myopic analysis that's very very important. But I'd like to make two general observations in perspective as to the meaning of these revelations.

The first is that the employment of a huge apparatus of secret agents and secret reports is no substitute for intelligent policy. And if you go back in the light of the Cuban crisis and review what was in the White Paper



MALE VOICE (cont'd):

on China, and get past the silly preface by Acheson,
you will see that . . .

END OF TRANSCRIPTION

* * *

